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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SOLANA IN AMMAN: DOWNBEAT ON ROADMAP, IRAN

Classified By: PolCouns Doug Silliman for reasons 1.5 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

1. (S) EU Foreign Policy Chief Xavier Solana briefed EU ambassadors in Amman September 1 on his recent swing through the Middle East and Iran. On the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Solana expressed extreme frustration that Palestinian infighting and Israeli intransigence would scuttle the roadmap, leaving no alternative solution in its wake. On Iran, he reported that President Khatami was stunned by the Najaf bombing, and that the Iranians were evasive when questioned about Iran's nuclear program and future cooperation with the IAEA. END SUMMARY.

SOLANA VERY DOWNBEAT ON PALESTINIANS...

2. (S) Spanish Charge Juan Jose Escobar (protect) briefed PolCouns September 2 on Xavier Solana's readout to EU ambassadors on his trip to the Middle East and Iran. In Amman, Escobar said, Solana saw King Abdullah and Prime Minister Ali Abul Ragheb, who listened to Solana's account of his meetings in Israel and the West Bank, but offered little in exchange. King Abdullah had criticized Arafat, Sharon, and Syria for their inflexible positions on the roadmap.

3. (S) Speaking from his notes of Solana's briefing, Escobar said Solana described himself as "very pessimistic" about chances for success of the roadmap because of Palestinian political infighting and the hardening of Israel's position on roadmap implementation. Solana expressed great frustration with the continuing battles between PA Chairman Yassir Arafat and PM Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). In his conversation with Solana September 1, Abu Mazen told him that he wanted to remain in office, but Solana believes Abu Mazen is "determined to provoke a vote of confidence" in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). PLC speaker Abu Alaa told Solana that, if Abu Mazen seeks a vote of confidence, he might well lose, then the PA would be left without a PM or a PM candidate acceptable to Israel and the U.S. By saying that Israeli considers Abu Mazen its only acceptable Palestinian interlocutor, Solana argued, Israel is inadvertently contributing to Abu Mazen's decline.

4. (S) Solana also expressed discomfort about infighting between Mohammad Dahlan and Jibril Rajoub for control of Palestinian security forces. The best solution to this battle, Solana posited, was to "end the dual control" of the security services by unifying them under an Interior Minister. Solana said that Arafat was working against this solution.

...AND ISRAELIS AS WELL

5. (S) Solana had even harsher comments for the GOI and PM Sharon. Israel's position that it will not accept a new Palestinian "hudna" (truce), its policy of continued targeted assassinations, and its hardened position on Arafat were "endangering the roadmap." Solana was particularly disturbed by Israel's policy not to talk to foreign leaders who visit Arafat. Solana said UN envoy Terje Roed Larsen, EU Middle East envoy Otte, and several EU foreign ministers had complained that this policy would make it impossible for them to speak to both sides and seek solutions. Solana had hoped to see PM Sharon on September 1, but was afraid that Sharon would refuse to see him (Note: Escobar said it was his understanding that Sharon had not seen Solana. End note.)

"A VERY GRAVE MOMENT"

6. (S) Solana feared that the peace process was at "a very grave moment." He told the EU envoys that the best possible -- although unlikely -- end to the current crisis would be

-- Abu Mazen winning a vote of confidence;

-- Dahlan gaining control of all Palestinian security services;

-- the PA taking some real steps against HAMAS and Islamic Jihad in southern Gaza; and

-- Israel responding positively to these Palestinian gestures by relaxing the closures and ending assassinations of Palestinian militants.

IRANIANS SHAKEN BY NAJAF BOMBING

17. (S) Solana then briefed on his visit to Tehran. Solana arrived in Tehran just hours after the bombing at the Shia shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf, Iraq, and said that President Mohammad Khatami and Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi were "stunned" by the bombing. Solana said that, for the first time in his meetings with the Iranians, he saw "the realization that Iran had to fight against terrorism, no matter its source or justification." Solana said Khatami and Kharrazi were "evasive" when questioned about Iran's willingness to cooperate with the IAEA on alleged Iranian enrichment of uranium.

COMMENT

18. (S) Escobar said Solana spoke most -- and most passionately -- about the peace process and his frustration with both the Israelis and Palestinians.

HALE